

16. UNUSUAL BEHAVIOUR OF TWO MALE RAT SNAKES, *PTYAS MUCOSUS* (LINN.)

On 8 May, 1966 we saw two Rat Snakes, *Ptyas mucosus* (Linn.) twined around each other, on a grassy patch of land at Rajpur. Though a crowd had gathered around them the snakes remained twined with the fore-body raised approximately 2 to 3 feet above ground and swaying to and fro. When first observed, we thought that the snakes were mating, but the everted hemipenis disproved this assumption. Later the snakes were shot by one of us (A.K.B.) but by the time we could bring a collection bag the watching crowd had started a fire to ward off the supposedly bad omen! However, the specimens were saved and later deposited in the Northern Regional Station of the Zoological Survey of India, Dehra Dun.

Neither Smith (1935) nor Wall (1906) have reported such unusual behaviour in the species. However, Abdulali (1941) who has observed similar behaviour, states 'the chances are that the males were fighting but no attempt was made to bite each other. It might be interesting to examine other pairs of snakes apparently in coitus'. Though the snakes we saw were swaying their bodies and occasionally hissing, yet no attempt was made to bite or to tighten the coils around each other. This behaviour is certainly unusual and apparently rarely seen, otherwise there would certainly have been numerous reports in the *Journal*.

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SMITH, M. A. (1935): Fauna of British India: Reptilia 3: 159.
WALL, F. (1906): A popular treatise on Common Indian Snakes. Part III. *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 17: 259-273.

[The exact significance of this behaviour known as 'combat dance' is not clear. It is thought that it may be due to sexual or territorial rivalry. This behaviour, though well known among some rattle-snakes (Crotalidae) and an Australian elaphid, has been recorded only for the rat snake among Indian snakes.—EDS.]